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ABSTRACT

Teachers and students will better understand the experience of learning if they become familiar with a general systems model of the relationship between a teacher and a learner (student). Concepts relevant to this model include learner background, readiness, initiative, and achievement; teacher knowledge, relationship to colleagues, cultural background, facilitative means, and adaptability to the learner; and interactions among these factors. Three hypotheses based upon these concepts which can be used to test various aspects of the learning experience are that (1) the organizational setting limits and structures the experience of each student, (2) the student's initiative is the primary determinant of the extent and quality of interaction between himself and the teacher, and (3) learning relationship styles will influence the goals achieved by the student. Knowledge of a general systems model can motivate both teacher and student by helping them understand the limitations of formal and non-formal learning environments and by promoting empathy for each other. Specifically, the systems learning theory can help students improve study habits, set realistic educational objectives, and seek more individual consultation with the teacher. Also, the theory can stimulate teachers to lobby for better organizational resources, improve relations with colleagues, and familiarize themselves with new teaching techniques. (DB)

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DEVELOPING THE LEARNING RELATIONSHIP:

IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

by Carl Slawski

ED164364

Introduction

The key concepts and variables necessary to thoroughly describe a teacher-student relationship are presented here in diagrammatic form. Terms and then hypotheses are discussed in researchable words. This seems to be the most efficient and useful way to present this summary of the fragments of literature on this most crucial of relationships, the one that facilitates a person's learning. It is states as though applied to the context of the school, but is relevant to any context. The analyst need only drop out of the consideration of variables not pertaining to his circumstances. The primary purpose of this general systems model is to understand as fully as possible the complete process in a way that will aid the learner to overcome any problems or difficulties in learning. Researchers, educational theorists and teachers themselves should be aided by the explanation. The statement is made largely in academic language, though one section on the allegory of "The Knowledge Feast" completely illustrates the points of the formal model in literary story form.

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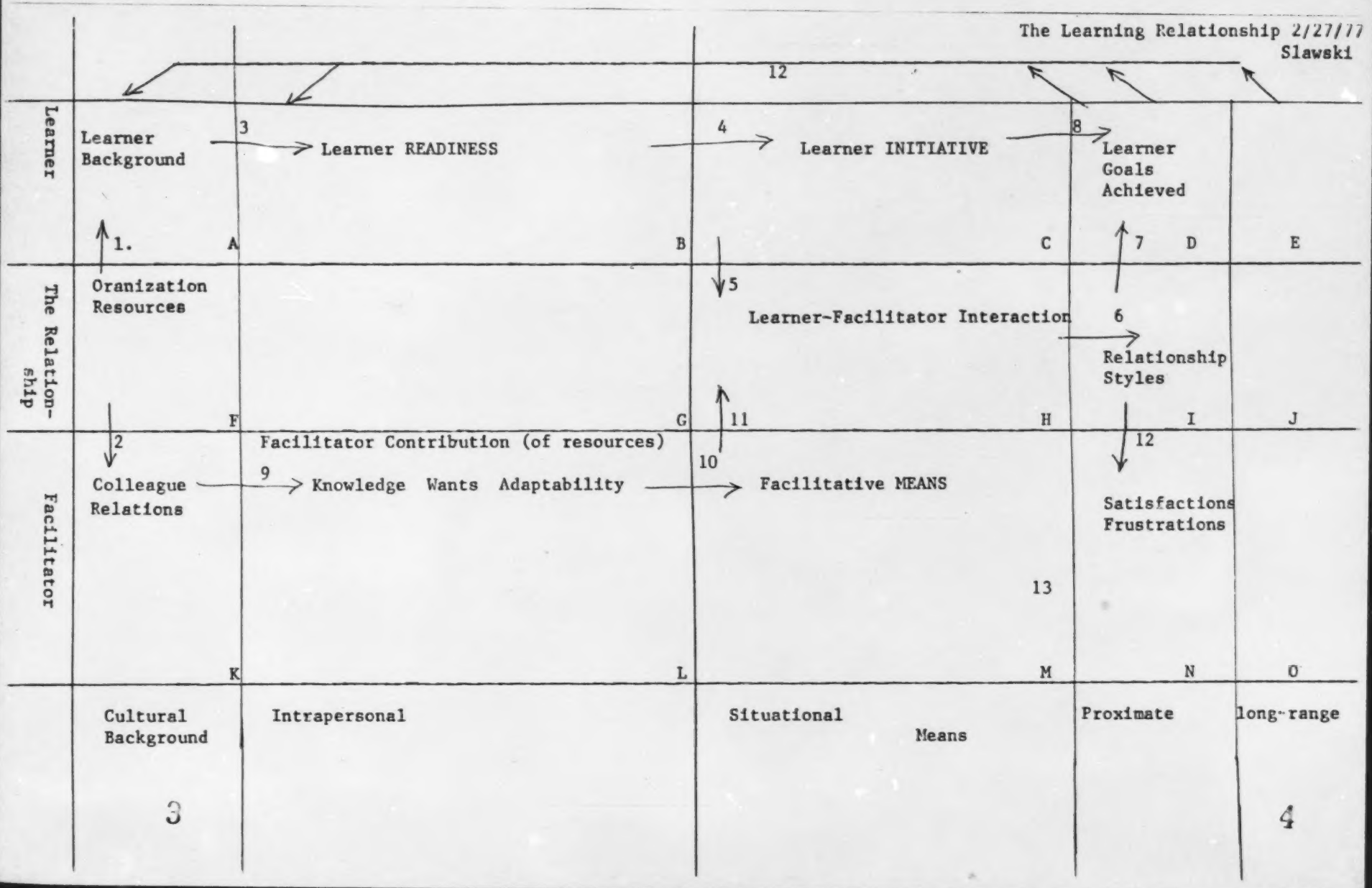
The Learning Relationship 2/27/77
Slawski



K	Friendship vs. Other Preoccupations	L	M	N	O
Cultural Background	Intrapersonal	Situational	Proximate	Long-range	

Diagram B

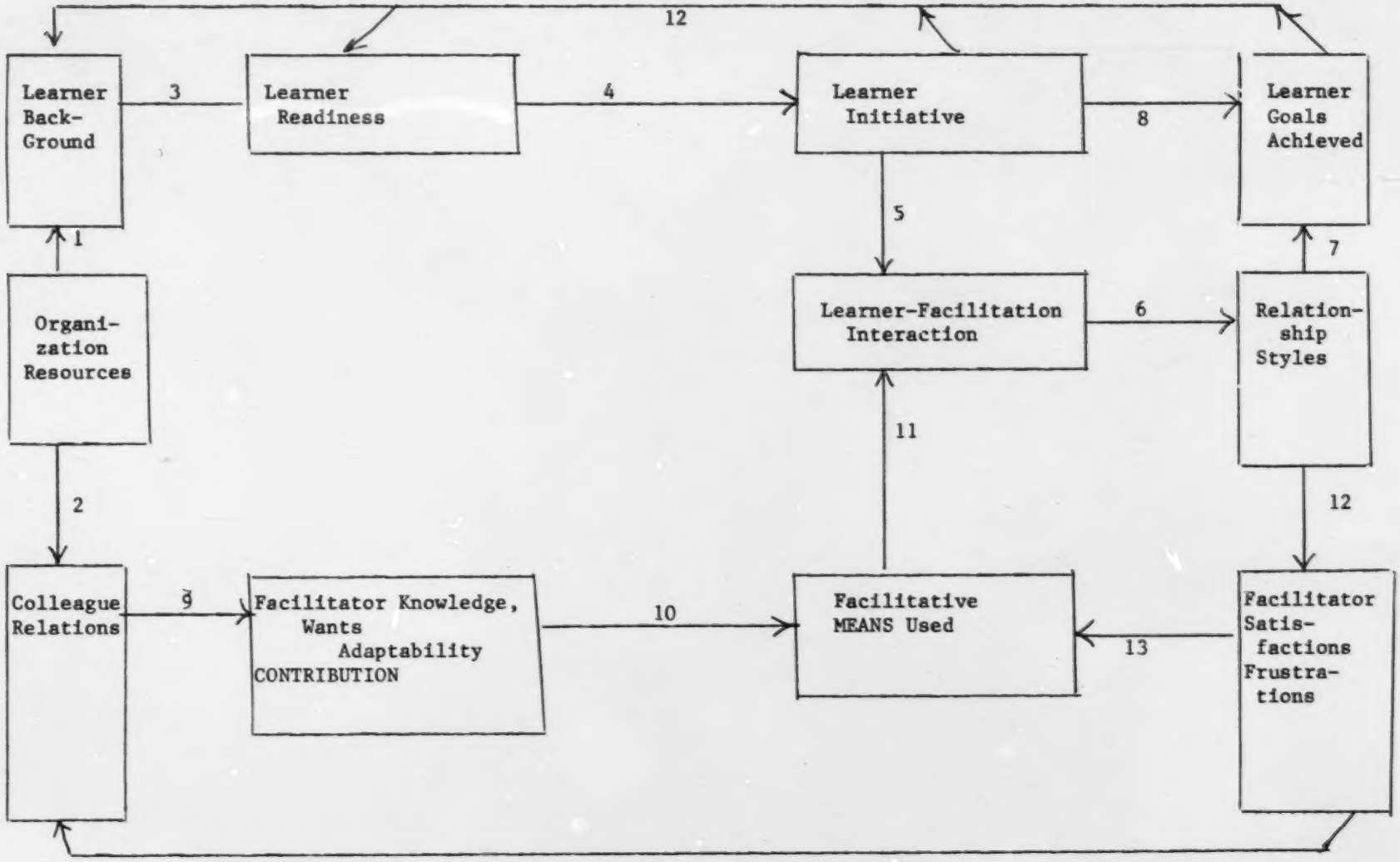

12
Learner Back-Ground
3
Learner Readiness
4
Learner Initiative
8
Learner Goals Achieved
5
1
7
Organi-zation Resources
Learner-Facilitation Interaction
6
Relation-ship Styles
11
2
12
Colleague Relations
9
Facilitator Knowledge, Wants Adaptability CONTRIBUTION
10
Facilitative MEANS Used
13
Facilitator Satis-factions Frustra-tions

Diagram C 8/12/74 The Development of Learning Relationships/SLAWOM

1 2 READINESS 3 4 5

Learner

1. Atmosphere:
Values
Peer Group
Department
Campus

Financial Support
SES
Outside Job Part-time/ Full
Family Influence
Other Activities

Interest
Ability → Receptivity → Approach
Background Preparation Goals Attained
Facts Skills Reasoning Ability
Eagerness vs. Other Preoccupations
(4) Values
(5) Non-Rational Sensitivity
(6) Appreciation for Ideas
Plan/Goals vs. Style, Urge/Wants
Adaptable to Teacher Style

→ Set up Conditions → Appropriately Aggressive Performance (Effort)
Study Habits
Regular Time, Place
Effective Expectance
Pressure/Anxiety
Reading Ability
Interest
Discuss, Write papers, exams, observe
Consult Instructor

Testable Goals
(1) Subject Mastery Facts
Methodological Skills
Critical Reasoning
(2) Creativity Hypothesizing
(3) Career Advancement

A B C D E

The Relationship

2. Resources Available-Needed

A. Group Interaction
Atmosphere
Simulations
Discussions
Peer Interaction
B. Individual Interaction
1. Accessibility
Resourcefulness
Encourages Successes
Demanding Expectations

(AB) 1 Group & Indiv.
2 Critiques of Work
3 Coordination
Effort
Outcome
4 Rapport
5 Subjectivity Encouraged
6 Democratic Relationships

Relationship Styles:
1. Colleague-Colleague
2. Prince-Disciple
3. Personalist-Needy
4. Merchant-Client
5. Bureacrat-Stranger

F G H I J

Facilitator

3. Support from
Colleagues
Administration

Job Pressures
Work Load

Knowledge → Want to → Adaptability
Experience Empathy Wisdom
Facilitate Teaching Pwr Sense of Satisfaction in Helping, Nurturing, Stimulating. Want Student
to Learner Time & Energy= Effort to meet Needs (truth) vs. Immediate Wants (=Grade)

C. Dynamism/Enthusiasm
D. Organization -Clarity
E. Analytic-Synthetic

Provide Resources, Structures

Requirements
Subject, Space, Time
Tracking
Fairness

Screening Course Entrants
Prerequisites

9 10

Concepts and Literature

The lists of terms under each of the eleven global concepts (corresponding to the eleven boxes in diagram B) will be detailed first. These global concepts also correspond to the fourteen categories in diagram A, namely, those labeled A through F and H through O. Diagram A is only an orienting or transition device to bridge the gap in moving the reader from Diagram B to Diagram C. Diagram C provides the detailed reference point for the description to follow. The squares in the diagram are lettered A through O, and will be treated in order. Notice that squares C, D and E correspond to three subdivisions of one global variable in ~~from~~ diagram B. Similarly, H, I and J and also M, N, and O correspond to one global variable each. As can be discerned all these clusters fall into the "situational" or right hand column, but the two partial columns (represented by squares D-E, I-J, and N-O are labeled "proximate" and "long-range" situational outcomes respectively. Note also that the left column is labeled "cultural background", and the second column is "intrapersonal" (or what takes place inside the person).

The top row represents the "learner." The middle row represents the "relationship" as a whole between learner and "facilitator". And the bottom row represents the "facilitator" or teacher (if any). The rows and columns describe quite natural categories. The process of placing specific terms in each box involved a kind of mental factor analysis based on a detailed list of relevant terms from the literature in education and social science. The bibliography to this paper lists the primary sources of these subordinate terms. The small arrows within squares indicate lesser hypotheses or directions of flow of causal or logical relations between these terms. These lesser hypotheses will not be dealt with here, but the arrows may suggest ideas to the interested

observer. References given below in parentheses point to possible sources of more detail on the terms indicated. The most general sources overall are Gage (1963), Travers (1973), Bloom (1956) and Slawski (1969 and 1972).

Terms

Box A (in diagrams A and C) represents the global concept of "learner background," and includes such notions as atmosphere (Pace: 1962) or values of the subculture, the campus, the department in which the student is primarily studying (if any), as well as his peer group (Feldman and Newcomb: 1970). It would also importantly consider his sources of financial support, which involve his (and his parents') socio-economic status (SES), and whether the learner has a full or part-time job. It must also consider his family influences and activities of any kind which take up a large portion of this time.

Box B represents the "learner's READINESS to learn", and begins with his interest in the subject matter. The literature on educational psychology invariably mentions this crucial variable. Perhaps even more emphasis has traditionally beer placed on students' ability, (especially through aptitude, ability and placement tests), as well as grade point averages, all of which purport to give measures of a students memory of basic facts in a body of knowledge, his skills and reasoning ability as well as his preparation, general background in the subject matter and goals attained in previous studies. The hardest of these to measure is undoubtedly reasoning ability, which depends so heavily on familiarity with the terms of the subject matter under consideration as well as general skill in self expression and articulation of ideas. Ability then spills over into the learner's receptivity to the subject matter, his eagerness to learn (in general and for this present subject), especially as this is balanced against his other preoccupations. Some additional items to be considered (taken from Slawski's set of twelve categories of means and goals of

education: 1969, and numbered here as in that earlier work as follows) include (4) personal and social values, (5) non-rational sensitivity, and (6) appreciation for ideas. (For full definitions see the earlier paper and questionnaire, 1969). Receptivity to the subject influences the learner's approach to learning the subject, his plan of study, his goals and style of learning or style of relating to the facilitator or teacher. What are his basic urges or wants in this learning encounter? How adaptable is he to the style of communicating taken by the teacher?

Box C represents the "initiative of the learner" which is first indicated by how he sets up the conditions for his own learning, primarily in his study habits (Wrenn: and many other authors), whether he has a regular time and place for study, how effective he is in carrying out his intentions, his experience in coping with roadblocks to effective study, the pressure or anxiety under which he operates at the time (McKeachie: 1963), as well as his ability to read rapidly and well, not to mention his interest in reading. Based on these background conditions observed in practice, the next subordinate variable is the learner's performance in the learning including the testing situation, whether he is appropriately aggressive, whether he puts out a good effort, how he performs in discussion with an informed group, the quality of his work on writing papers on the subject, his sharpness of perception in observing the subject matter, his work during examinations, and his consultation with the instructor. Naturally, he may not be judged by many of these criteria if he is learning the subject by himself unaided by a teacher. In that case, the analyst may simply ignore those variables which are obviously inapplicable to the case he is analyzing.

Boxes D and E represent "achievement of learner goals," D being the proximate goals, and E the long-range goals. Short-range or proximate goals

(D) are more testable in most cases. These involve mastery of the subject matter (1) (see Slawski; 1969 and 1972), which involve mastery of facts, methodological skills and critical reasoning. A more subtle and difficult to measure goal is that of creativity (2) (Slawski: 1969 and 1972), which may involve the ability to state hypotheses which meet accepted criteria for testing and explanation. Added together these proximate successes allow the learner to reach his long-range goals (E), which are largely viewed in terms of his overall career advancement (3) (Slawski: 1969 & 1972).

Box F, beginning the "relationship" row of the diagram, represents the "organization and its resources," including both resources available as well as those which are needed, whether available or not. The observer must also seriously consider how well the various departments in the organization articulate with one another or mesh in practice. Box G is empty because the notion of an intrapersonal relationship between two people does not exist , or at best exists only in the minds of the separate partners, and must be viewed as part of their separate mental processes.

Box H represents the "INTERACTION between the learner and facilitator." It involves group interaction (A) (Hildebrand: 1971), including classroom atmosphere, and is dependent on such matters as whether simulation games are used, or discussions, and how much interaction occurs between peers or fellow-students on the subject matter. Another large factor to consider here in the Individual Interaction (B) between teacher and student (Hildebrand: 1971), including accessibility of the teacher (1) (Slawski: 1969 and 1972), resourcefulness of teacher and student in coming up with new vehicles for teaching and learning, the extent to which the learner is encouraged by and for his successes, and degree to which the expectations of learner achievement are in evidence on the part of both teacher and learner. Then there is a combination of group and

individual interaction (A+B), which includes the use of such educational means as (2) critiques of work given by the instructor, (4) rapport between teacher and student, (5) extent to which subjective responses are encouraged by the instructor, as well as (6) how democratic these relationships are in practice. All of these are to some extent encompassed by the somewhat more global notion of (3) coordination of actions between the teacher and student, how much effort they expend to work together, and the outcome for the relationship in practice.

Boxes I and J are proximate and long-range relationship outcomes stated in terms of relationship styles (Slawski: 1972), which include the author's typology of five major types, emphasizing task orientation or socio-emotional orientation. The (2) prince-disciple type is high on task and socio-emotional factors, but is a hierarchical or authority based relationship. The personalist-needy (teacher-student) type of relationship is high on socio-emotional factors but low on task orientation by comparison. The merchant-client type (4), very common in large public universities is high on task orientation but low on socio-emotional. The bureaucrat-stranger type (5) is low on both socio-emotional and task orientation, an unfortunate but too common style. Then there is the longer-range style in box J, in the colleague-colleague relationship, where emphasis is high on both task as well as socio-emotional factors, where the student is treated as an equal partner in the search for knowledge, perhaps one who is lacking in the requisite experience to complete a project in the accepted manner, unaided by his colleage who also happens to be his teacher. This is an equal and democratic relationship, as far as that is possible. And it is no doubt more possible than common in all but the most exclusive of learning institutions.

Box K represents "colleague relations," the first box in the facilitator row, cultural column. Important factors to consider here are the amount of

support a teacher receives from colleagues and administrators to do his job, to do it well, and to try innovative ways to increase the motivation of students and their interest in the subject. The job pressures and work load of the instructor are not very easy for students and outsiders to university life or school problems to realize. Only occasional rumors give a cue as to what may be preoccupying the thoughts of a teacher and preventing him from doing his best, or preventing him even from doing an adequate job.

Box L represents the "Facilitator's contribution" to the process as a whole. It naturally begins with his knowledge of the subject, his experience in dealing with it, as well as his social intelligence, his empathy and wisdom as a practitioner of his art or science. Closer to the teaching process, his contribution is bounded by his wanting to facilitate, the power of his teaching personality, motivated by the sense of satisfaction he may receive in helping students, in nurturing their progress, or stimulating them to new insights and experimentation. It ought also to include his wanting or desire for student friendship and the pull of other preoccupations which would prevent this. Naturally the discipline or subject matter could obviate the necessity of close relations between teacher and student, but that will often be obvious to the careful observer. Finally, the adaptability of the facilitator to the learner is important. He will have to try in most cases to give incentive to the student to seek more than the immediately obvious student desire of a good grade. And he will ordinarily try to do this by putting out the requisite effort, or time and energy to guide the learner to a search for truth and self-affirmation in the course of learning the particular subject matter.

Box M represents the "means used in facilitating learning" by the facilitator. It might well begin with the enforcement of prerequisites, the screening of course entrants, the setting up of course requirements of more or less stringency,

the allotment of latitude, space and time for free learning experiences, or tracking of students for various grades desired. It includes fairness in grading. It very importantly involves the structuring of courses or units of study and the provision of various resources to aid the students' initiative and progress. These factors are usually judged in terms of various items on the teacher-evaluation questionnaires, such as (C) dynamism-enthusiasm of the teacher, (D) organization-and-clarity of the presentations, and whether the teacher (E) takes an analytic or synthetic approach to the subject matter.

Boxes N and O represent proximate and long-range educational goals of the facilitator. These are primarily his satisfactions and frustrations with individual students, with the average student, their quality and the positive or negative feedback he receives about his teaching from colleagues, or from adminstrators. No attempt has been made yet to specify or differentiate short from long-range goals or outcomes for the facilitator, because they are as diverse as the number of philosophies of education and styles of self actualization. Some hints on developing a typology of teacher outcomes however can be gleaned from reading the descriptions of the five style of teacher-student relationship delineated elsewhere by the author (1969 and 1972).

With this description of the terms of the accounting scheme, the reader should be ready to apply it to his own experiences as a teacher or as a learner. Plausibility of the reader's application will be the measure of success of this model.

Hypotheses

The thirteen numbered hypotheses to follow correspond to the thirteen numbered arrows in Diagrams A and B. The hypotheses are based first on the logic illustrated in diagram A with its 5 columns and three rows. From left to right the four columns correspond to three types of action system (in modified

Parsonian terms), or more specifically to three role types (cultural, intrapersonal and situational) along with the two-fold types of outcome or goal, proximate and long-range. From top to bottom the three rows (as noted) represent 1) the learner (with his contributions and accomplishments); 2) the relationship as a whole between learner and facilitator; and 3) thirdly, the facilitator himself (with his background influences, behavior and satisfactions in this relationship, etc.).

Box G (in Diagrams A and C) is empty of course because an intrapersonal relationship cannot exist. A relationship (as defined here) is interpersonal and behavioral or perhaps only imaginative (on the part of either facilitator or learner separately). There is no way to fuse imaginations in practice in the empirical, non-mystical world.

The total model is summarized in all three diagrams, A, B, and C. Diagrams A and B have numbered arrows which correspond to the following hypotheses.

Background Hypotheses

1. The organization provides a setting and resources which limit, filter and broadly structure the background of the individual student or type of student.

   A. Some of the background factors which the learner brings to the situation or which the institution helps to provide include the student atmosphere or campus atmosphere, the values of the students and their peer groups, the organization of their major department, etc. The student of course must have financial support such as through an outside job (either full or part time), which in turn is related to his socio-economic status, and the support or influence of his family on his education and career.

2. The organization also provides the opportunity for furthering as well as a filter which limits the range of establishment of various kinds of colleague relations.

   A. This includes administrative support, work load, etc.

Hypotheses: From the Intrapersonal to the Situational (Learner Input)

3. The learner's background contributes to his readiness to learn.

   A. This readiness has cognitive, affective and conative components which might be discussed as the factors of ability, receptivity to the subject matter, and the approach of the learner to his task. Ability includes such things as the student's background, preparation, goals attained to date, facts known, skills mastered,

and reasoning ability. Receptivity includes his eagerness to learn despite or even because of other interests or preoccupations, his values, his sensitivity, particularly non-rational sensitivity to the subject matter, and his general appreciation for ideas. His approach includes his general plan of attack on the subject, his goals, his learning style, wants, urges and mode of adaptation to the teacher's style.

4. The learner's readiness to learn will largely determine the degree and quality of his initiative in the learning situation.

   A. In terms of teacher-evaluation questionnaire items, readiness to learn could be indicated by class standing, GPA, number of prior courses taken in the field, career goal, goal as a student, why he is taking this course, the three most important motivating factors for learning in this course, tolerance of ambiguity, long term goals as a student, interest in the subject matter, understanding of social research methods, understanding of social theory.

   B. His initiative could be indicated by the number of times he asks or answers a question in class, how often he consults the instructor, how hard he worked in the course, whether he kept up with assignments, whether he wrote down questions for the instructor, the grade track selected, his thoughts about the objectives of the instructor, and the number of hours per week he studied in the course, how many hours of class he missed, his perceived aptitude for the course, and his own objectives for the course. His study habits for the course are a good overall indication of initiative.

5. The learner's initiative is the primary determinant of the extent and quality of interaction between the learner and his facilitator.

A. Interaction is indicated by the actual vs. preferred style of teaching mode (as indicated on the questionnaire). A non-collegial mode of teaching however puts the initiative back on the shoulders of the teacher rather than the student.

6. Learner-facilitator interaction patterns (in terms of means and goals of education) will promote a particular style of relationship between them.

   A. Interaction patterns may be measured by the items on individual and group interaction.

7. The styles of learning relationship will influence the types of goals achieved by the learner.

   A. Relevant questionnaire items pertain to goals achieved, how much the student learned overall, and in terms of facts, skills and critical thinking.

8. The initiative of the learner will also lead to achievement of some goals directly (without the aid of the teacher).

   A. This could be examined with the questions on where most of the learning took place, and how they would have changed their study habits.

Facilitator Input Hypotheses

9. The types of relationships a facilitator has with his colleagues on the faculty will affect his ability and desire to provide resources to the learner.

   A. Colleague relations are correlated with knowledge available, willingness to help, and adaptability to the learner's style and to the learning situation or atmosphere.

10. The kind of contribution which the facilitator is able and willing to make will determine the educational (or facilitative) means he will initiate and promote in his relations with students.

    A. Educational means would include prerequisites, screening of course entrants, requirements, time demands, tracking, fairness, structures and resources provided, dynamism and enthusiasm, organization and clarity, and an analytic-synthetic approach to the subject.

11. The range and kind of educational means which the facilitator provides and promotes will primarily aid (or hinder) the patterns of interaction that occur between the learner and facilitator.

12. The relationship style that exists between facilitator and learner will have a strong influence on the satisfactions and frustrations of the facilitator in his job as teacher/facilitator.

13. The satisfactions and frustrations of the teacher/facilitator provide a direct corrective mechanism which lead him to alter the facilitative means he uses in teaching. Feedback arrows at the top are intended to run from each of the three boxes in each of the three right hand columns back to the corresponding one (of three) rows in the last two columns. E.g., boxes C, D or E feed back into boxes A or B; H, I or J feed back into F; M, N or O feed back into K or L.

Specific types for all the variables in the hypotheses stated above have not yet been mapped out. Nor have precise measuring instruments been developed. But an intelligent and experienced reader (of the three-part questionaire used for the present research, in combination with observer and teacher comments, discussions of course outlines, etc.). can discover and specify measures for almost all variables mentioned. In fact there are several possible indicators for some variables. Future research could certainly easily make them more specific.

Diagrams B and C provide a different look at the material in diagram A. Diagram C is the most detailed, and will require some study and thought on the part of the reader to see applications. The hypotheses and qualifications stated above were developed primarily from the concepts treated in this diagram. It is hoped that it will provide the general theorizer with much food for thought about the development of learning relationships. Many years of revising went into the model. And the present research and interpretations are couched in language that is directly related to the general model. Eventually, further articles or a book can be written with this as a basis.

Having stated the hypotheses with little explanation, it may be helpful at this juncture to restate them with some commentary and further description. Recall that hypotheses are the essence of social scientific theory.

Hypothesis 1: The organization provides a setting and resources which limits, filters and broadly structuresthe background of the individual student or type of student. Although it may seem almost too obvious to state it formally, it is easy to get caught up in the blinding syndrome of credit hours and weekly routine, become unconscious to the pervasive influence of campus atmosphere, degree and kind of available resources and facilities, not thinking of alternatives, such as other schools or working for better facilities or programs at one's present school, or steeling oneself as a student to get an education despite the peer pressure, the curriculum, work requirements and preoccupations working at cross pruposes to a well-rounded education. An old saying among serious students is "Don't let school interfere with your education."

Hypothesis 2: The organization also provides the opportunity for furthering as well as a filter which limits the range of establishment of various kinds of colleague relations. Even less conscious to the vast majority of students is the jungle behind the blackboard, the petty politics of too many academics, a

debilitating competition for scarce resources and rewards, their overwork and resultant resentments and hatreds, battles for tenure and promotion mostly at right angles to the burden of teaching. These pressures are like those of any large organization but in most cases are multiplied by the inertia of tall bureaucracy, entrenched by age-old traditions and childhood ideologies of teachers and administrators alike. Deplorable as these background conditions may be at times, they must be taken into account if the student is sincere about understanding the forces that inhibit or promote his learning. Perhaps a laissez-faire attitude is the one most likely to succeed, or "comme si, comme sa."

Hypothesis 3: The learner's background contributes to his readiness to learn. Each student brings with him a certain native ability, previous training, skills, interest in the subject matter, and method of beginning his study, formal or informal. These more than any other factors condition the learning that takes place.

Hypothesis 4: The learner's readiness to learn will largely determine the degree and quality of his initiative in the learning situation. This is probably the most important hypothesis so far as the student's learning is concerned. Readiness and initiative can very often override all other factors, especially minor psychological barriers and organizational factors.

Hypothesis 5: The learner's initiative is the primary determinant of the extent and quality of interaction between the learner and his facilitator. A learner can have no more satisfactory or no better a relationship with his teachers than he is prepared to initiate although the teacher nearly always has the controlling hand.

Hypothesis 11: The range and kind of educational means which the facilitator provides and promotes will primarily aid (or hinder) the patterns of interaction that occur between the learner and facilitator. (Order of presentation

of the hypotheses varies in order to fit the direction of thought of this elaboration more smoothly). The educational means used by the teacher limits these interactions, but the student in most institutions can invariably find some teachers that mesh with his mode of learning.

Hypothesis 6: Learner-facilitator interaction patterns (in terms of means and goals of education) will promote a particular style of relationship between them. The resulting interaction maintains a certain type of interaction style.

Hypothesis 8: The initiative of the learner will also lead to achievement of some goals directly (without the aid of the teacher). Still in all, student initiative may well lead him directly to his learning goals.

Hypothesis 7: The styles of learning relationship will influence the types of goals achieved by the learner. In most instances the type of relationship in force between teacher and student is the last filter to achieving the learner's goals.

Hypothesis 12: The relationship style that exists between facilitator and learner will have a strong influence on the satisfactions and frustrations of the facilitator in his job as teacher/facilitator. This relationship viewed from a more general perspective provides the major satisfactions of most teachers.

Hypothesis 13: The satisfactions and frustrations of the teacher/facilitator provide a direct corrective mechanism which lead him to alter the facilitative means he uses in teaching. This is the process by which the teacher adapts and updates his teaching skills.

Hypothesis 9: The types of relationship a facilitator has with his colleagues on the faculty will affect his ability and desire to provide resources to the learner. Colleague relations can be a great support or a great hindrance to a teacher's updating of his knowledge, and can be a spur to fulfilling his wants or adapting to the needs of students.

Hypothesis 10: The kind of contribution which the facilitator is able and willing to make will determine the educational (or facilitative) means he will initiate and promote in his relations with students. This contribution of the teacher in practical terms leads him to use a certain type of educational MEANS.

With all these ideas the cycle is complete. The picture is quite a bit more complicated than any but the most involved students ever become acquainted with. However, it is the author's sincere wish that these ideas will throw a light on the student's plight in a way which will make him a more informed participant and initiator of his own learning. Thus, in order to concretize further, or to free the reader's imagination, an allegory will be presented. The numbers in parentheses correspond to the hypotheses as numbered in diagrams A and B above. Ideally the reader will first read the allegory, ignoring the footnotes or references. Then he should read it with his finger on the hypotheses in the corresponding diagrams in order to better see the connections.

THE KNOWLEDGE FEAST

Part I: A Melancholy Allegory

Once upon a time, they gave a knowledge feast (2). It was a smorgasbord really, held in a hundred room crazy sort of castle on the ridge just outside of town. The pantry was full of food stuffed into nooks and crannies and pigeon holes, all tersely labeled and numbered with the size and weight of each morsel. Some boxes were empty, and some fi-led fuller than others. Most were three inches square. There was a separate cook for almost every box of food. The kitchen was crowded, but so were the dining room tables, full to overflowing. There was a high fence around the patio. No one was sure why. Rumor had it the fence was to be sure outsiders didn't get in, or so guests couldn't come and go too freely. Paper pushers let in guests who had the right papers while (9) the cooks prepared their menus and began to prepare the food.

There was such a fuss in the kitchen most food came out looking like hash or stew. (1). Naturally a lot of guests came with false teeth and bad stomachs. (Their entrance papers didn't say nothing about that! (sic)) (3) Some even had trouble spelling or even reading. Rarely could they write sentences.) TV dinners had spoiled their taste buds. Most were too poor or too busy on their treadmills and rat mazes to know any better. (10) While the food was on the stove, (4) the guests set their own tables for themselves with their own plates. It was a hodge podge of plates and bowls and glasses and silver of every description, a motley collection, hardly an heirloom in the lot, except in dining room 99, the accommodation for the richest, those with the best papers.

Some guests smacked their lips, but most sat impassively. It was such a long line outside, and the paper-pushers' gauntlet was bewildering. "It's enough to make a person lose her appetite" said one. (Occasionally one vomitted, out of sight of course.) "I wish they'd hurry up, said another,

"I have to catch a rocket ship for Pluto in 60 minutes." The latter felt reassured when the cook came in and said they'd all have to finish in fifty minutes flat. "Some feast!" said one old man (over 30), "hardly a chance to have a good salad." By this time, the old man was about the only one that looked hungry anymore. There was a cook assigned to each of the one hundred rooms.

(8) At the guttural sound of a buzzer the cooks came in and the guests helped themselves to the cellophane wrapped, predigested bite-size morsels. Once in a while one asked for a whole slice of meat. After being scrutinized and cross-examined by the cook he usually got it. Most though were too eager to get it all over with. They unwrapped their bite-sized, predigested morsels, gulped them down and got out of there. The paper-pushers gave them a ticket stub as they left the front door. The stubs were almost always three inches long. At least it was a cheap meal, a lot like a TV dinner, except you had to bring your own plates. And you washed your own dishes.

(5) Those who hung around the whole fifty minutes got to introduce themselves to their cook. They showed him the shape and color of their plates and bowls and glasses. They sometimes told him how hungry they were, or even about their false teeth and bad stomachs. Some cooks had a little time to admire their plates and silver, but if twenty-five guests stayed in each dining room, that left only two minutes apiece for the cook to talk to each one. It was susally easier for him to make a long speech to take up the time. That changed the whole complexion of the feast. The best speech-makers had the longest waiting lists. Cooks who tried to get to know their guests better, face-to-face, didn't have much of a chance. By the time they spread the serving platters and poured the goat's mild they could only talk to about four guests before the annoying buzzer grated its farewell to all.

(6) The atmosphere was antiseptic even though the floors were dirty in most of the one hundred dining rooms. Meanwhile there were a few smiles and a bit of banter exchanged while the guests learned to follow the castle's ground rules. There wasn't much scent of choice dinners for nearly everything was cellophance wrapped. A few good friendships were made between cook and guests. But most saw the cook only from a distance. Or they talked to him only to find out how to unwrap the cellophance packets, and in what order to do it. Some cooks found this routine frustrating, but couldn't find jobs in any smaller castles, so they stayed on. They fought a lot with fellow cooks (in the pantry). And most lived together in the giant chicken coop in the back lot. They ate chicken feed. A few cooks, who had a hard life, liked it there. Most didn't have any opinion one way or the other.

(12) A few guests said thanks to the cook before they left. Most just paid their door tax and took their stub. It was way too much work for average pay, and for so many, many years of training and apprenticeship. (13) Some changed their way of serving guests next time around. Or they changed the menu a little. That was a little risky because the paper-pushers took note of changes and there were a hundred other cooks available, eager to take their place. So the menu stayed the same. [See lower feedback arrows.] They introduced variety by printing the menus with different color covers from year to year. And there were advertising campaigns, and of course cheap prices to keep guests coming. Somehow it worked. No one knew any better.

(7) Some are with gusto. Most ate too fast. They are so often they didn't notice the lack of nourishment received. They susally blamed their indigestion on the bad speeches made by the cooks. Some cooks served such large morsels that the guests were unhappy at first. Most went to another dining room where the cook was less generous. They usually just wanted a lively speech and their three inch stubs afterward.

Top Feedback arrows. It was a wonder so many guests kept coming back. There was a very high turnover. It was after all a strange feast: Bring your own plates, a hundred room castle, door tax, cellophane-wrapped, pre-digested bite-sized morsels, cooks giving speeches, paper-pushers giving out three-inch stubs. It was a sight to see.

The castles were indestructible. At least they've always been there, so far as anyone knew. (They may have had short memories.) The guests lived ever after. As far as we know anyway. No one thought to ask. And they lived happily. They must have! But no one really knew. After they got their forty "three-inch" stubs, each from a different dining room, no one heard from them again. At least they learned how to follow the castle's ground rules. Maybe that's what it was all about!? Or was it collecting stubs? The sun went down again. And invitations were sent out again. Flyers trumpeted: "Welcome to the morrow's knowledge feast! A hundred cooks! Three inch stubs! Cheap!"

Part II: THE KNOWLEDGE PARTY

With Sanguine Sauce

Today the sun rose bright. And I got up on the right side of the bed. It was a rare day, and full of joy. One of the best cooks I know held a secret party back in the carriage house behind the castle. (1) They tore a hole in the back fence to let in all the guests from the back alleys. (3) They were starved. (10) Steak and chicken and green salad were served, and lots more. (4) But it was mainly "pot luck," then beer and wine. (2) A couple other good cooks showed up too with deserts and fresh vegetables. (9) All who could cook pitched in and helped make it a genuine taste treat. (10) Each one did what he did best. (4) And the guests pitched in. (5) They couldn't wait to be served. They helped themselves (11). That's

how the host and cooks like it best. (8) They helped themselves when hungry. (6) They milled freely about and some told tall tales or read poems. Others listened intently. It was a smooth community. (7) The feast was enjoyed in moderation. (12) The cooks could see that everyone was content. (13) They hardly had to change a thing. But the evening was fluid. (Feedback bottom.) The menu was great. Plans were already heard for another put-luck next feast day. [Top feedback.] They shook hands and embraced and drifted in and out as they pleased. Animated talk was heard on into the night. And they lost track of time!

Practical Value of the Theory

Teachers and learners with a scholarly bent should be enabled to formulate a total picture of the forces which influence their learning experiences, alone or with others. Knowledge of the present theory could motivate both teacher and learner by aiding their understanding of the limitations of the system under which they operate while at the same time promoting empathy for the person on the other side of the desk (or authority barrier). On the part of students, the theory could stimulate more independent efforts, improving of study habits, self-motivation, or preparation for classes, taking courses with more or fewer prerequisites, with a more difficult but better teacher, or more cooperation with fellow students, more individual consultation with the teacher, or even petitioning and organizing to obtain new courses, or reorganization of the curriculum, more freedom for student initiative, or higher standards, or greater restriction of the large mass of disinterested students who may be slowing his individual progress, or modifying his overall goals, changing his major, his work hours, or dropping out of school altogether.

On the part of the teacher, depending on his overall assessment of the variables, the theory might stimulate him to such actions as lobbying to obtain better organizational resources, improving colleague relations, spotting trouble-spots or deficiencies in planning for the future needs of his department, updating his knowledge of his teaching specialties, devoting more or less time to preparing his classes versus outside activities, familiarizing himself with new teaching techniques or the preoccupations of students, their work load and typical cognitive orientations, especially in relation to the variables associated with campus atmosphere (Pace: 1962), attempts to modify classroom atmosphere (in a more or less structured direction), attempting to spend more time getting to know interested individual students and their needs, becoming less frustrated by

failures, more adaptable to individual member versus group needs, learning to enjoy the total experience of teaching more, or even searching for a better job. A review of course evaluations and keeping a journal of progress in teaching would be most helpful in this regard.

Significance

The following two paragraphs will try to show how the present theory is an advance over other previous perspectives. All the major relevant causal variables are explicitly brought to bear on a contextual view of how learners learn, in or out of a school. The systems model places the variables in a systematic as well as dynamic relation to one another. Most so-called theories are only taxonomies (Zetterberg, 1965). At best they state a few hypotheses about the teacher's or the student's role ( ). What is most necessary for advancement of theory and practice today is more comprehensive yet practical theories, stated in the form of testable hypotheses. A further advance, to make it easier on the analyst is a systems model, which provides a synthesis for greater understanding and more broadly-based interpretation of practical problems. The present paper has attempted to do this. The theory was developed from much philosophical and practical literature, experience and questionnaire items from teacher-evaluation forms to keep it down to earth.

This model is so basic and down to earth that no one could say it is hard to apply. Although the individual hypotheses are not so easy to test because they are only partial links in the overall chain of theory. For the same reason prediction is difficult, though retrodiction is made quite simple. Taken as a whole, the model in its hypotheses and concepts when thoughtfully applied are highly explanatory. It provides plenty of grist for the mill of description or information in ways which are open to innumerable types of concrete application.

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